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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Military component of United Nations peace-keeping operations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Military component of United Nations peace-keeping operations" (A/50/576).

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ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. GENERAL

1. The Secretary-General considers that the report has fulfilled its basic objective, which was to contribute to current efforts to improve the capability of the United Nations for planning and managing the military component of peace-keeping operations, by providing a comprehensive review of those matters, which would be indispensable for a reader in need of introduction to the subject. It can serve as a valuable reference source for the ongoing review of the peace-keeping function, machinery and resources of the United Nations. Most of the report consists of descriptive narrative, which accurately and thoroughly reflects the contents of General Assembly resolutions, the reports of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on peace-keeping problems, as well as opinions of troop-contributing countries on various related matters. As for the latter, such opinions are mostly rendered in the report without any attempt at assessing their validity, ascertaining whether they are representative of the majority views or are exceptions to them, or trying to evaluate their relevance for appropriate action. The Secretary-General notes that the report does not break any new ground in the ongoing discussion of the subjects it addresses.

2. The report is focused entirely on the interchange between the United Nations Secretariat and its governing bodies. It disregards the extensive body of academic literature and reports by independent research institutions on the ways and means of strengthening the United Nations peace-keeping capacity, which contains a number of novel views, approaches and proposals. The report could have gained considerably from addressing and assessing them.

3. The focus and scope of the report are well taken. However, the report could have benefited from a more proactive, discretionary and specific analysis by its four authors of the subject matter, offering their own ingenious approach and creative solutions, going beyond those already recommended or under implementation.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

4. The Secretary-General concurs with the intent and essence of this recommendation, which corresponds with his established policy. Concerning related specific proposals, enumerated in paragraph 15 of the report, the following should be noted:

(a) It is the standard practice of the Secretariat to dispatch a technical mission to the emerging mission area well in advance of the start of a peace-keeping operation whenever feasible. Such a mission usually consists of experts in political, military, civilian police, logistics, administrative and personnel

management matters. It should be noted that, since October 1994, the Department of Peace-keeping Operations utilizes integrated and coordinated mission planning based on a project team/management approach. It was used, in particular, for preparing plans for the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) and the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH);

(b) and (c) While these two proposals are subject to action by the Member States, it is of note that the latter duplicates the former and subsumes it to a large extent. This notwithstanding, it should be noted that the requisite political support by Member States for this idea is not in evidence;

(d) The Secretary-General is pleased to note that the report affirms the value of the "Friends of the Secretary-General" arrangement. This affirmation could have had added value had it also addressed the legitimacy aspect, which may sometimes arise from the fact that "Friends" are self-appointing.

Recommendation 2

5. The Secretary-General notes that the recommendation coincides with the course of action currently followed, to the extent feasible in specific cases.

Recommendation 3

6. The recommendation is fully in accord with the current practice of all peace-keeping missions. Special attention is paid to correcting any deviations from the established lines of command and control immediately, whenever they occur.

Recommendation 4

7. The Secretary-General notes that the recommendation is addressed to the General Assembly and, in this connection, would like to acknowledge that the initiatives of a broad range of Member States, including those comprising the "Friends of Rapid Reaction", already fill this need. Asking a high-level group to prepare yet another report could have the undesired effect of detracting from the useful proposals that are already on the table.

Recommendation 5

8. This recommendation reflects the existing approach. An examination of this issue by the Department of Peace-keeping Operations concluded that a uniform urging to extend the tour of duty would have negative ramifications for the morale and efficiency of the troops. However, individual decisions by some national contingents who are willing and able to maintain an extended tour of duty on a case-by-case basis are appreciated.

Recommendation 6

9. The Secretary-General supports the recommendation and would like to note that the Convention was open for signature from 15 December 1994 to 31 December 1995 and currently has 43 signatories and 6 States parties, whereas

22 instruments of accession or ratification are required for its entry into force. The Convention remains open for accession.

Recommendation 7 (a)

10. In line with this recommendation and in accordance with the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/223 of 11 April 1996, a follow-up report on the standardization of death and disability benefits is being prepared for submission to the Assembly at its fifty-first session. Subject to its decision on the matter, the proposals of the Secretary-General, to be presented in the forthcoming report, could lead to a new system of death and disability benefits. It should also be noted that action is currently under way to examine the possibility of the insurance scheme to cover all troops on the basis of requests for proposals from the global insurance market.

Recommendation 7 (b)

11. The Secretary-General would like to recall that, in its resolution 50/222 of 11 April 1996, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendations of the Working Group on Contingent-Owned Equipment and a relevant proposal of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the reform of the procedures for determining reimbursement to Member States for contingent-owned equipment, and decided to put the reformed procedures in place from 1 July 1996. These new arrangements are intended to simplify the current mechanism and, subject to the availability of cash (if the timeliness of payment of assessed contributions by Member States improves), are expected to facilitate the rapid reimbursement to Member States of the costs attendant upon the use and depreciation of contingent-owned equipment.

Recommendation 7 (c)

12. The recommendation fully coincides with the course of action pursued by the Secretary-General and reflected in his reports on the implementation of procurement reform in the Secretariat. 1/ The thrust of the ongoing reform is aimed at achieving an integrated mechanism, which will bring together not only the purchase of equipment, but also the control of transportation, distribution and asset management in order to achieve better accountability and transparency. The members of the High-level Group of Experts on Procurement continue to work directly with the management and the staff members of the Procurement and Transportation Division in order to bring about the reform expeditiously.

13. Regarding transparency of procurement, the number of exceptions to competitive bidding was substantially reduced in 1995 compared with previous years. The Office of Conference and Support Services and the Department of Peace-keeping Operations are continuing in their efforts to reduce this number further.

14. In order to enhance the specificity of procurement information, the Field Administration and Logistics Division is currently studying the feasibility of developing an effective centralized procurement plan, which is conceptualized as a combination of centralized contracts for most commonly used goods and services, variable quantity contracts and mission contracts. The Division has

also taken measures to develop an automated letters of assist application within the strategic procurement database to allow for the reliable control of creation and tracking of letters of assist. The comprehensive implementation of this application for establishing and/or amending all such letters will ensure proper internal control and management of this important procurement mechanism.

Recommendation 8

15. The recommendation fully reflects the Secretary-General's course of action.

Recommendations 9 (a) and (b)

16. These recommendations reflect in broad terms the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General. While substantial progress has been made along these lines over the last three years, further improvements will be extremely difficult to accomplish in the present financial situation, with a zero-growth regular budget and exacerbated by the reduced funding of the support account for peace-keeping operations.

Recommendation 9 (c)

17. The thrust of this recommendation is embraced in plans developed by the Department of Peace-keeping Operations in close consultation with Member States over the past year and now well advanced.

Recommendation 9 (d)

18. The recommendation is fully implemented.

Recommendation 10

19. The recommendation fully coincides with the course of action pursued by the Secretary-General.

III. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Translating mandates into operational plans (para. 19 (b))

20. The Secretariat is fully mindful of its primary responsibility of translating mandates into detailed operational plans and, in so doing, maintains continuous and effective liaison with troop-contributing countries in political, military and logistical areas, as well as in matters concerning the role of civilian police. While the Secretary-General fully appreciates the report's acknowledgement that in certain cases the failures to translate mandates into comprehensible plans were due to the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the former, it would have been instructive to have included in the report an analysis of those other cases where such failure is attributed implicitly to the Secretariat, rather than a blanket observation to that effect not substantiated by factual evidence.

Capacity to manage peace-keeping operations (para. 67 (a))

21. It is difficult to accept the report's broad assessment that the integration of military and civilian sides is not yet fully developed. The generally accepted analytical standards would require that criteria for such "fully developed integration" be laid out, existing situations assessed against such criteria, shortcomings pinpointed and ways and means identified for advancing such integration. In the absence of any meaningful analysis, the observation in question does not carry any instructional value.

22. The Secretary-General takes exception to the statement that "the Department of Peace-keeping Operations has not solved the perhaps insuperable problem of mounting a peace-keeping effort with troops from countries of dissimilar levels of development and differing standards". In fact, the Secretariat has mounted close to 40 such operations in the last 40 odd years, achieving the highest feasible degree of operational cohesion and unity of action between national contingents of differing military standards. As a remedy to this problem, the report proposes the establishment of a skeleton of "classical general staff" in the Department, who would manage competent personnel on loan from troop-contributing countries. It is not clear how a classical general staff at United Nations Headquarters would alleviate the fact that troops in the field come from countries with dissimilar levels of development and differing standards.

23. Nevertheless, the idea of a general staff is supported by the Secretary-General, if for somewhat different reasons than those cited in the report. Part of the value of the general staff would be in the development of institutional memory with regard to the military aspects of peace-keeping operations. The "skeleton" or core of such a unit should be permanent and the purpose of loaned officers would be to support them and provide surge capacity.

Paragraph 67 (b)

24. It is not clear what the report is trying to suggest here.

Integration of the Field Administration and Logistics Division into the Department of Peace-keeping Operations (para. 67 (c))

25. While it is self-evident that the Field Administration and Logistics Division carries out its functions independently of the Department of Administration and Management, given that it is organizationally separate from the latter, it is hard to comprehend what factual evidence lead to the report's conclusion that the Division functions independently of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and that its integration is not complete. The Field Administration and Logistics Division is an integral organizational unit of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and carries out its functions under the guidance and full control of the Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations.

Participation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Political Affairs in the planning of peace-keeping operations (para. 77)

26. The Secretary-General takes exception to the rather blanket judgement that "neither the Department of Humanitarian Affairs nor the Department of Political Affairs participate sufficiently in the planning of peace-keeping operations and [...] that this participation should be further institutionalized", which deviates from established practice within the Secretariat. Both of the Departments, in their respective competencies, are fully involved through the "Framework for Coordination", interdepartmental working groups and direct contacts between the responsible officers, both at the preparatory stage of peace-keeping operations and throughout their implementation. It should also be noted that whenever the Department of Political Affairs is participating in negotiations leading towards a peace agreement, it takes into account as early as possible the peace-keeping aspects of the implementation of the agreement and consults on the subject with the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

Notes

1/ See A/C.5/50/13 and Rev.1 for details.